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## Book Review: A Networked Self and Love

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## Book Reviews

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Zizi Papacharissi (ed), *A Networked Self and Love*. New York: Routledge, 2018, 266 pp.: ISBN: 978-1-13-872255-2, £24.99 (pbk).

**Reviewed by:** Chrysi Dagoula, *University of Groningen, Netherlands*.  
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In the anthology *A Networked Self and Love*, Zizi Papacharissi brings together a range of perspectives and essays on the theme of love by drawing on ‘conventional understandings of love’ and exploring how ‘we might evolve out of them’ (p. 9). The book is part of a series of four volumes that develop Papacharissi’s thinking on the different manifestations of the self within networks, which was first explored in her book *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, published in 2011. While the first title successfully captured the explosive growth of social networks and the centrality of the self, this new series expands the thematic reach of the original book by including research on platforms, stories and connections; engaging with new discussions on human augmentics, artificial intelligence and sentience; depicting the circle of life that is partially taking place within new digital arenas – and by capturing love.

The collection of essays in *A Networked Self and Love*, goes beyond simplistic interpretations of romantic love and delve into discussions about sentiment, networked acts that help to outgrow traditional conventions that define relationships, and ultimately, about the meaning of love. Introducing the book, Papacharissi guides the reader through the ‘behind-the-scenes’ process of the book, while offering an insightful interpretation of core concepts. For instance, she contextualizes love in relation to the notion of autonomy. In a non-paradoxical way, autonomy is seen not as an alienating factor that creates distance between ourselves and others, but as ‘the ability to attain self-fulfillment’ (p. 2). As such, the self is central to Papacharissi’s understanding – it is a prerequisite to be able to love or to be loved – or in the editor’s words ‘while love is communal in nature, it is self-based in its origin’ (p. 10). In a similar way, Papacharissi discusses technology as inherently attached to its maker or user – ‘technology is human and humans are technology’ she writes, emphasizing that ‘we emancipate, we confine, or we create standstills for ourselves through our technologies of being’ (p. 2).

Throughout the book, we are witnessing the various stages of love (‘love forms, grows or dissolves’), but also all the stages in between. Right from the start, love is discussed as a polysemic word that attains meaning from its social context. This is also reflected in the fact that the book embraces this multiplicity of meanings and presents a variety of research approaches. The chapters

range from examining technological infrastructures (such as Davidson's, Joinson's and Jones' chapter on the technologically enhanced dating and Karppi's chapter on social bots) to the more personal accounts of how love could be theorized. An example of the latter is Phillips' powerful chapter. Drawing on her own trauma, the author develops a thought-provoking theoretical discussion about the process of understanding the self and of establishing a personal way of seeing as a path to identify and understand intimacy – and eventually love.

The theme of the self and its various manifestations is the common thread that unites the 13 chapters of the book and connects the various interpretations of love that are presented here. For instance, Gershon points to the 'neoliberal self' as a version of the self that is constantly positioned and adjusted, even subconsciously, in relation to the marketplace. Through interviews with undergraduate students, the author points to the issue of the manageability of the self by arguing that 'each technology serves as a distinctive vehicle for people to explore the quandaries of being a neoliberal self' (p. 28). Similarly, Markowitz, Hancock and Tom Tong reinforce this representation of the self (and self-reflection) through the exploration of the dynamics of online dating, by following its various phases (the creation of a dating profile, the matching and the discovery stages) and by questioning the authenticity of self-presented identities. Self-presentation along with everyday communication, interaction and conflict are central to Toma's chapter, which discusses the maintenance phase of romantic relationships, and aims to understand how communication technologies affect couples' well-being and stability. Simultaneously, all these chapters unpack the established rituals associated with actions related to love and explain how these are adapted to various digital affordances.

*A Networked Self and Love* is a captivating, enjoyable read. By placing love within the context of contemporary society, it shows the enormous impact technology has on the development, the expression and the dissolution of sentiments. Technology can help us to 'reimagine and reinvent how we understand love and life, over and over again' (p. 5) as Papacharissi writes, but also as she later explains 'technology does not give love the kiss of eternity; but it can afford love new meaning' – it is probably this very phrase that stays with the reader after finishing this exceptional book on one of the most complicated, yet fascinating, topics in (probably any given) society.

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Suzanne Scott, *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019, 340 pages, ISBN: 978-1-479-87957-1, \$30.00 (pbk).

**Reviewed by:** Amanda C Cote, *University of Oregon, USA*  
DOI: 10.1177/1354856519861739

In *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry*, Suzanne Scott takes on the difficult task of reconciling two competing trends in modern fandom. On the one hand, media industries and popular culture are increasingly accepting fans and fandom as mainstream rather than marginal. This is exemplified in the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the rebooting of classic fan franchises like *Ghostbusters*, and even the creation of Star Wars themed areas within Disney parks. On the other hand, recent years have also witnessed numerous attempts to police what fandom is and who fans are, often around these same media properties. This can be